



## Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article      June 27, 2016

### A Shady Tradition

by Lydia Holley

Shade is nice to have, especially when the temperatures begin to soar. Deciding which plants to choose for a shade garden, however, can be difficult to determine. One shade plant I would never be without is the mophead hydrangea. This plant has great sentimental value to me because my grandmother grew beautiful blue mophead hydrangeas that amazed me as a child and delight me still as an adult.



Mophead hydrangeas are the traditional, old-fashioned hydrangea people have seen in gardens for years. They have large round blooms that grow to such magnificent size that they almost look artificial. These beautiful blooms are usually a striking blue in East Texas, but can be pink or tinged with purple in some areas.

Since their color is dependent upon the pH of the soil, and most of East Texas has naturally acidic soil, most mophead hydrangeas in this area bloom blue. If your hydrangeas are pink, you know that your soil pH is more alkaline. I have even seen hydrangeas blooming pink, blue and purple on one bush.

Mophead hydrangeas traditionally bloom on old wood. These days, there are some varieties that will bloom on new wood, but to be safe, it is best to prune them as if they bloom only on older wood. This means that you should not prune your mophead hydrangeas in early spring, or even in the autumn. You may prune mophead hydrangeas in summer, if you want to keep them to a specific size. However, you may be delighted to know that mophead hydrangeas can do without any pruning at all.

Although mophead hydrangeas will look like dead sticks in the spring, they are just dormant. When the weather warms, they will magically begin to grow leaves along the stems, and all you have to do is be patient and wait for their blooms. The only time my hydrangeas have not bloomed was when we received a late spring freeze and all the new growth was killed.

Mopheads hydrangeas like to be well watered. They will often naturally wilt in the afternoon, but if they are wilting in the morning, they need to be watered. They must have afternoon shade, but appreciate some morning sun.

You can enjoy your hydrangea blooms all year if you bring some dried blooms inside for the winter. Simply let the blooms dry on the bush, then cut the bloom, remove the leaves, and enjoy. They will be a naturally aged color. If you want dried blooms that retain their blue or pink color, you will need to dry your blooms with the use of silica gel.

Growing mophead hydrangeas are a Southern garden tradition, one I feel should be continued for a number of reasons. Grow mophead hydrangeas for a burst of color in the shade. Grow mophead hydrangeas to amaze a

child, or yourself. Grow mophead hydrangeas for sentimental reasons. Or, if you have no sentimental attachment to them, perhaps you will want to grow them to start a garden tradition in your own family.

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